

MCC Peace Section Task Force on Women in Church & Society REPORT

Report 30/March-April 1980

Focus on Returned Missionary Women

A Smorgasbord of Testimonies

Features for this *Report*, focusing on returned missionary women, were coordinated by Anita Buller and Delores Friesen. Anita (Winnipeg, Manitoba) is a former member of the Mennonite Central Committee Peace Section Task Force on Women in Church and Society. Delores (Iowa City, Iowa) is herself a returned missionary woman, in the United States for extended schooling after thirteen years in West Africa.

Here are testimonies (fifteen) of all kinds—from people between terms of overseas service, from people having completed longer or shorter terms, and from “retired” people. They represent us in all our fascinating variety—reflection of an infinitely creative and resourceful God who made us. Let us read and empathize and rejoice and learn.

To the accounts that follow, Anita Buller adds: “Some who preferred to remain unnamed spoke of feelings of loneliness compounded by the inability to relate to those at home; *having* seemed more important than *being*.”

Some felt segregated; support and affirmation was experienced only with other missionary families. One person said, ‘So few could hear the crying.’ Some experienced the shrinking of the friendship circle and frequent loss of self-worth as persons while ‘at home.’ There seemed to be little understanding of the spiritual and social conflict being faced. ‘We simply had to work these things through ourselves,’ they said.

Anita continues: “Some needs expressed were (1) mental and physical restoration before beginning public ministry; (2) sensitivity on the part of home churches to the needs/gifts of the returned one (one expressed such painful memories about having to make impromptu speeches); (3) to be able to live transparently, to be able to share honestly the frustrations and doubts of/about the work without being labeled ineffective or without faith; (4) for a sympathetic listener who can be trusted by returning persons who need to repeat their grief and loss experiences; (5) a sense of being welcomed with their unique perspective

Coming Back

Some of us come back with a prophetic zeal and concern.
We speak out of great pain.
We try to share what we have seen,
what we have felt,
what we have heard.
Our courage inspired by the
human suffering
and the
governmental insensitivity
that we have known.

Some of us come back
burned out,
tired,
discouraged,
unable to return
because of health, or lack of visas, or
revolutions and political instability or
family needs.

Some of us come back with a vision—
with an understanding of
what the church is and
what it could be.
Having been a part of the church

in another place,
it is hard to be content with
the narrow North American brands of
Christianity.

We try to share.
We speak.
We struggle.

Why, we wonder,
do our North American friends fear change so much?
In the foreign country
change is constant.
Governments rise and fall.
Hunger is always near.
Death is a part of every family.
Aging is almost unknown.

One must change, adapt, keep trying
Or one does not survive.

Is it not better to survive with a heart that is alive and
hurting than to grow old with eyes that do not see and a
heart that does not care?

Delores Friesen
13 March 1980

and insight, of being 'in their very presence, received as a gift.' "

Delores asks, "What does one lose and what does one gain when you try your utmost to identify with the adopted culture/country? Should missionaries do more to help their children know and enjoy their country of origin? There are those among us who quite literally have no country, no place they ever feel at home."

And, moving to another part of the subject, Delores writes:

"This is a large part of the re-entry dis-ease: we, the returning ones, are not sure if you here even have an agenda. We don't realize what your concerns and mission involvements are. Congregations, relatives, etc., here have no idea what kind of agenda the missionary or MCC volunteer has been consumed with for X number of years. Both the churches and all the persons involved in the situation would benefit from discussion. I suggest this as a good exercise for congregations to do with returning personnel. Make it a time of sharing priorities and visions, and for goal clarifying" — mts

Not Retired!

by Margaret Hogg

A missionary enroute to the mission field for the first term was staying in a pastor's home. A conversation was overheard in which a visitor asked the pastor's small son this question, "What would you like to be when you grow up?" The reply was, "A returned missionary." He had a special advantage in his home to observe the acclaim that a returned missionary received. There were welcome-home services, banquets, gifts, exciting stories. In the childish mind there was a certain sense of "aura" about a returned missionary.

But what about the returned missionary? Is it an enviable position? Shall we reveal the heart of one of them?

After twenty-four years of service on a mission field I begin to wonder: what shall I do when my time comes to leave the field? My life has been wrapped up in this land; its people, language, and culture have in many ways become mine. I've shared these people's joys and sorrows; I have been in attendance at their physical birth and their spiritual birth. Furlough times have made me aware that I am going to be a misfit in western affluent society. The thrill of visiting churches and friends, of sharing missionary vision, will come to an end. I am too old to enter another vocation—too out of touch with modern trends of life.

There come to mind the words of the Apostle Paul in I Corinthians 9:27: "...when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." What a fearful thought to someone who is used to constant activity in gospel work. It would be a living death.

Then came to me the realization that this was also a new opportunity for dedication—equally as important as our first dedication for service. One time I was willing to go as God would lead; now I needed to be willing to

leave. "Lord, I die to self, desires, and wishes. I am willing for change. Lead me as Thou wilt."

The welcome home was beautiful: days of visiting listening to music and praise; a time to relax. Then a waiting time, a listening time. Gently but surely God opened another path of service. In this case it was with a new audience. Many women were hungry to study God's Word. The doors were opened to teach home Bible studies. Once again proving God never shuts a door without opening another when a returned missionary will say, "Here I am Lord, lead me in your way." Not retired, but refired.

Margaret lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

An Eight-Point Re-Entry

by Byrdalene Wyse Horst

1. Prices. Things in the stores seemed so incredibly cheap compared to Argentina that we were tempted to buy more than we needed. We resented people's talking about how expensive stuff is here. Then on top of those low prices you have winter sales!

2. Trust. We were impressed by the way you could trust people here and how helpful they are. When people here give directions to a place, you can trust it to be right, and if they don't know they actually admit it! ...You can also call a store and find out the price of something. We were used to storekeepers saying they didn't have an item, and then you'd go and find it on the shelf. We were amazed to find that we could take something back to the store and they would receive it with no fuss. We were impressed that when people here say they will do something, you can be pretty sure they will.

3. Phone. It was incredible to us the time and energy that the phone saves. We realize how face-to-face Argentine life is and how the people depend on that contact. It's time-consuming, but you make lots of friends in the process!

4. Noise level. We were impressed by how low and even-toned people talk here. Sometimes I wanted to yell to counteract that, also in church because speaking was such a monotone.

5. Closed-in feeling. At first the children would go to the window and say, "Can't we open the window? Sometimes I want to stick my head out." But the winter cold didn't permit that. I sometimes hate to have the curtains shut. At church at first I could hardly stand the stuffiness at having so many people crowded into a room and not having any door or window open. I couldn't believe that others there wouldn't be aware of the smell.

6. Carpeting. This in houses seemed too luxurious. I found myself overwhelmed by it; there was no relief from it—not one bare spot to step on, no breathing space. I resented having to continually tell the children not to splash, not to spill food, not to get their paint on it. Carpeting is comfortable, but it restricts one's freedom in many ways.

7. Music. I could hardly believe that good classical

music was available twenty-four hours a day on the radio. One doesn't need to buy records and cassettes. The good four-part singing at church moved me to tears at first. It was soul music to me (which reveals a definite cultural bias).

8. Television. We chose not to have TV because we never had one and so aren't dependent on it. We wanted the children to do other kinds of things now. They can watch specials at friends.

Byrdalene and Willis Horst are on furlough from the Argentine Chaco, living in Elkhart, Indiana. They plan to return to their ministry with the Toba Indians after a year.

Is There a Place for Me?

by Lorina Marsch

Because we were in the pastorate of a church of 250 members in Germany, there are many parallels to our similar situation here in Canada.

Taking charge of situations, organizing accommodations and meal service for hosting the European Mennonite Brethren Conference, starting new programs, and doing the unexpected were by far my most fulfilling experiences overseas.

If all worked well, the conference days could be relaxing with everyone having a part. Here in Canada the various committees do an efficient job, but the danger of fragmentations and depersonalization is apparent. Practicing open-house at all times took all the drudgery and routine out of housekeeping. This informality provided many opportunities for counseling without being classified as such.

Starting the *Teestube* (Hospitality Evangelism) was a major undertaking. Meeting non-church young people and sharing the gospel with them was rewarding and often wearing. I miss most of all the meeting of new young people every week and communicating with them. This will be possible here only when there is a group of church-loyal young people who are willing to make room for any fellow or girl who takes the claims of Christ seriously.

Starting women's groups gave me great joy, especially when I was able to persuade another woman to take leadership after several years of seeing her gifts bloom. In Canada with election of officers every year, it seems harder to unfold the beautiful gifts that some people have.

Here in North America the role of pastor's wife seems to be that of a figurehead safely out of the way at the head table. As time goes on, I hope I will have the grace to sort out my priorities within the existing framework and take my place here. Who knows, maybe in the complex structure of organization and tradition capably carrying out the program here, even a person like me will learn team-work!

Lorina lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

3 Question: Where Is Home?

by Cathy W. Bowman

It's been three months now since we are back in the States and we are surviving. The decision to stay in North America was a difficult one, especially for me. It was prompted by the conviction that there was more to be done here in the fight against poverty than "over there."

Re-entry isn't always easy. On one hand, life goes on as usual, with minor adjustments such as having to wear shoes and coats. On the other hand there is a deep bewilderment of the heart: "what am I doing here? I want to go home." I am not yet reconciled to living in the U.S. (though it may be all right for some people.) I grew up in France and was geared to spending my life overseas. When we first came home I thought it was question of mind set. I was just going to have to make up my mind that this was the way it was going to be. I am no longer convinced of that.

We are committed to a simple lifestyle, and have done some speaking on the subject. Some people ask us how long we have been home and nod their heads: "Oh, you are still going through culture shock." It would be so much easier to settle down in the mainstream and try to forget the larger world. If one is constantly reminded, how can one but want to go back? And how can one keep from feeling guilty at having so much, and from wanting to do something about it?

Some aspects of culture shock were not so overwhelming this time. Having been through re-entry before, we knew what kinds of feelings to expect when being confronted with big cars, lots of food and the general consumerism of the U.S. The first time I walked through a shopping mall I felt like Rip Van Winkle but by far the most difficult thing for me is knowing I may never go back overseas to live. We have two children, Chad (5½) and Kimberly (4). I wish I could understand better what they are experiencing. In some ways it seems they are adapting better than we, their parents. Certainly they didn't seem to mind the cold as we did. They are having some trouble with different foods but they never were good eaters. We speak about Indonesia among ourselves but they don't like to talk about it with others, especially with strangers. The only time Kimberly cried to go back was when we received a letter that our helper had had a new baby. They had had many talks together about this baby and how it was Kimberly's "adik" or "little sister." Naturally she wanted to claim it. On the whole they seem to be adapting well. But when Kimberly sits in the corner sucking her finger, what is she thinking of? Does she too want to go home?

"You Have Been a...."

by Helen Loewen

The wonderful Bible study was just coming to a close. We had looked at "I am the vine and you are the branches." Christ in you the hope of glory. You the vine can be transplanted anywhere, trained to assume

another form, trimmed to produce new growth, and treated to bear more abundant, tasteful fruit.

Our pastor was asking individuals to share some of the "cutting" experienced at the hand of the Vinedresser. As he went along the circle, my husband shared his conversion story. Then as my turn came, our pastor said, "Now, Helen, what have you to share? You have been a missionary for many years. A worker who has been retired and is now at home. What cutting has God had to do in your life?"

Immediately the "You have been a missionary; you have been a worker" stabbed me to the quick. In that frame of reference Satan had thoroughly briefed me recently with many questions. To remain victorious I had looked to God to give me my answers. So now I was ready with my reply:

"I am not a has-been missionary. I am still a missionary. I am still a worker. My call to be a missionary has never been rescinded. True, I have been transplanted from one country to another. My Lord has seen fit to give me different work, has changed my status, has never absolved me from being a witness where I have been placed."

Let me share with you how God has helped me to cope with the feelings of "you have been..." When you realize that it is not what you do but *who you are* that makes a worker then you never cease to be a worker. Granted the Master may transplant you from one culture to another. Of vital importance is that your inner person flourish in this new place. Only then can you be a witness to the Lord Jesus even unto the ends of the earth.

Your position or status may be changed. Transplanted into a new place with different responsibilities, you are still serving alongside God. You are a co-worker together with the Lord, learning a new profession, but still being in the same vocation.

Perhaps in your present position the works that need doing are the ordinary tasks, giving very little scope for your developed skills. Do them with joy as unto the Lord. God gave them to you. It does not behoove you to grumble that the church in which you are now placed does not appreciate your developed skills and experience. Be more concerned that they find you the mature, versatile, ready-to-hand worker who inspires others and demonstrates faith; be concerned that the fruit of your transplanted and trimmed vine are not the wild grapes of fleshly works, but the full juicy fruit of the Spirit.

Basically the challenge to develop new skills should rejoice your heart. God may have planned for you a different type of work. God has transplanted you, so you need a period of rest. God has trimmed you drastically by stripping you of your former position, so await His positioning. Fill the niche you are in and fill it effectively. Do not expect to do the same "works" you did before. That is one sure way to miss the better works which God would have you do.

God never demotes. Remember John the Baptist's words: "He must become greater and greater and I must become less and less." We admire the attitude which

John displayed—not that of a grieved worker who thought he was not appreciated, but rather that astonishing willlessness that you and I need to be ready for our next task.

As you are being poured out from vessel to vessel, resent not the Creator's hand. Resentment for pressure and inactivity can disturb the inner peace. Strive not to obtain a certain position. Abide God's timing. The words "you have been a" should be like heady wine that is without cloudiness and sediment.

Helen (Mrs. P.J.) Loewen lives in Waterloo, Ontario.

Four Experiences

*by four women in British Columbia
who wish to be known only as
"returned missionaries"*

Did you find it very difficult to adapt to the primitive culture in that foreign land? No, not really, I expected the worst and accepted what came as it came. Sure we have some struggles and surprises but that's what makes life interesting in a "foreign field".

But arriving home sick, after many years of service on the field, is quite another thing. We are a very close knit group on the field that struggle together, pray together, work out solutions to problems together and rejoice together in victories. You have the feeling of belonging to a group that represents a larger group or conference at home. You have a definite voice in this group in decision making. You, by necessity had to do a great deal of organizing and administering such as being responsible to the local government for a whole school system, starting a junior high school from scratch, educating wives of senators and deputies, etc. You felt you had a definite place to fill in a greater whole.

Then coming home sick after so many years of service you are absolutely at loose ends. And to top it all off, the pastor of your home church completely ignores you. You finally scrape up enough courage to go and greet him, but he also ignores that: You have so very much to relate about the latest happenings on the field and how the church at this time stands in very special need of prayer, and does nobody care? That is heartbreaking. No briefing, no word of comfort (that you so sorely need at this time), no encouragement except from some dear ladies that come and say that they have been praying for you for years. You are completely at loose ends. Were you not working in their field? You begin to feel alone, nobody to share with, nobody who understands, no belonging to any group. If only somebody would invite you to their home in order to make some contact." You begin to feel crushed. Some neighboring churches will allow you a 5-minute "report" in their very busy schedule of special songs, etc., or ask you to entertain their little ones while the mothers attend an important meeting. Your frustration grows. Are people not interested in the eternal destiny of souls that are perishing? Don't they want to know what's going on, or are you ignored because you are a woman? You're too sick to take over a Sunday school class on a regular

basis. This is misinterpreted as just not wanting to help in your local church. That really hurts! You might as well accept the idea that you're a misfit.

Financially you're not faring much better. For a while your support still comes in. (Some are being cut off when they arrive at home, and that is disastrous.) But when that ceases then you wonder which way to turn. You're still suffering from the illness that brought you home. Besides, all the experience you had in your profession on the field is counted as nil here and you're asked to renew and upgrade your education. You have neither the money nor the strength to do so. Finally you start giving a private language class and earn \$5.00 a week. You clutch that in your hand and go grocery shopping.

But God gloriously brings you through, and you stand amazed! Glory to His name!

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Needless to say that the adjusting has been very difficult, and I thought I'd never make it. Today I can say that I'm happy in what the Lord is enabling me to do and praise Him for it. But it took a long time and I had to go through many battles, struggles, tears, prayers, and calling on the Lord. Adjusting to this life of affluence just seemed impossible at first. My mother, of course, was my first stand-by and still is. I need her and she needs me, so we share work and needs as well as prayer daily. Many friends helped in sending letters, poems, or special clippings. Friends from church helped me to get to church and over the initial jolt. The greatest and most consistent friend was a nurse friend of mine. She came over often and we shared and prayed together. This deepened our friendship, for which I praise the Lord.

After one year at home, having been asked to help along with some work with the East Indian group was a great challenge and made me feel that God still had a place for me, even though I felt that everything from under me had been taken away. The involvement in Bible studies at the Hini Gospel Chapel has made my life more meaningful. But it has taken time—three years—and sometimes I still feel out of place. I doubt if that feeling will ever leave me. On the whole, I can say that I'm adjusting and I praise the Lord for grace that is sufficient. Would I like to go back? Of course, I would. If and when, the Lord knows. In the meantime I continue to press toward the goal that God has for me now.

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Sixteen to eighteen years from home creates estrangements in social life, church life, school life for the children, and professional life. Things have changed. New friends have to be found, and adjustments made. Reorientation courses are mandatory to qualify for professional jobs. Children are looked upon as intruders until they have been accepted in school and in the neighborhood and church circles. One is behind in current events and fashions. By the side glances one receives you're being made aware of being very outmodish. In our case it was the ignorance of bilingualism existing in Canada because of Quebec.

Because one feels not understood one faces a certain creeping feeling of loneliness and appreciates all the friendship one can get. Involvement is a great help to bridge that gap. Eventually one begins to feel that one is in the stream of life again.

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The hardest thing for me was facing the affluence here at home. It's such a shock. Not that we don't want people to have it, but the indifference—at least, seeming indifference—to the need of help on the mission field is difficult for me to understand.

In church the pastor had said: "We hear that our missionary has come home. In case she's here, let her be welcome." Nothing more personal than that.

Another thing is that when single women come home they are expected to move in with relatives or a parent, whereas married couples are always provided for by the church and sometimes extensive preparations are made for their return. My parents (older people) were expected to change their life style because I had to move in and live off of them until such a time as I would get a job.

Re-Entry, Again and Again

by Irene Weaver

Re-entry! I am 70 now, and re-entry has almost become a style of life for me. It has happened fourteen times to me in these seventy years.

Very frequently someone has said to me, "Well, how does it feel to be back? But by this time you must be used to coming back."

I never know how to answer a question like that. I have come away saying "one never really gets used to it, whatever that means."

To say that re-entry has become part of my life style doesn't mean that it has ever been easy, or that it is something that I have easily put on and off as I do my coat. It has been painful and yet joyous, wanting to re-enter and yet not wanting to leave my adopted home in another culture. I have been scared of being considered odd, looking odd, sounding odd. I have been fearful of the subtleness of becoming comfortable in an affluent society. I have been frustrated because I didn't know how to recognize, let alone use, all the new gadgets which had come on the market in my absence. I dreaded the endless Sunday schedules and appointments. I longed for a time to be quiet, to be understood, to be accepted the way I am and for who I am.

And yet....

I know how important each furlough or re-entry has been to my term of service in a foreign culture. I am still learning how important it is to stand back and evaluate my experience objectively from a re-entry vantage point.

Each time I have returned to the mission field I have gone back knowing more truly than ever before that people do care about me and the family I leave behind.

I know how very important it is to keep in touch and grow with the people among whom I will spend my last years. I know how much I want them to know and feel that I care about them too.

More important than any other factor is the opportunity to keep close ties with the family. For the joy of being reunited as a family, each re-entry has been something I can't describe. The words are filled with tears and laughter. On one special time coming back from Ghana to the States, in 1971, our children met us in New York—with red roses. What a joy! What a re-entry!

Re-Entry: Roses, red ones, with thorns, too. Beautiful, yet painful. Fulfilling, and yet leaving a longing, a yearning for that other part of God's family—out there.

Irene and her husband Ed live at Schowalter Villa, Hesston, Kansas.

A 14-Year Vantage Point

by Katherine Jantz

It was spring 1966 when my husband and I with five young daughters returned to our homeland Canada. We had spent a decade abroad in missionary service in both South American and Europe. Since it's such a long time ago, and adjustments happen gradually, it is difficult to reflect accurately the struggles that I as a woman, wife, and mother grappled with. I know there were many very real fears.

One immediate concern was our material needs. During those ten years we had completely dissolved our household three times on three different continents. I remember thinking each time that the Lord's return was so imminent that we wouldn't need these things anyway so we might as well give them away. Now the hard realities of life really hit home to me. Where were we going to live? How were we going to obtain the furnishings needed to set up our household? We really learned to trust God. There was a great temptation to look to people for help. And God did use people, and we experienced miracles. God is no one's debtor.

Another concern as a mother was for our children. We grew really close to each other as a family. Since we were new in the community we needed each other in the family. The children had to learn a new language, integrate into a new school, make new friends, adjust to a new way of life.

A concern for adjustment as a woman was my re-entry into my chosen profession as a nurse. As soon as family circumstances allowed, I took a refresher course. For the last twelve years I have had a part-time nursing job. I love it and receive much satisfaction in helping people physically and spiritually in their time of crisis. I see it first of all as a service to God, as well as a needed supplement to our family's support.

A basic ground rule for us whether "at home or abroad" is that our reason for living be to serve God and people. In our adjustment we have tried to resist being caught up in the pursuit of material things. This world is not our home. We want to remain pilgrims on our way

to our eternal home. I want to remain sufficiently detached to be able to respond to God's leading to another place of service.

Adjustment to church life "at home" was delightful for me. After having been responsible on the mission field for preparing programs, inviting people, initiating ideas, and generally making things happen, what joy to be able to just simply join in with others. Even today I just love to fellowship with other Christians in our local church setting. Sunday is the week's highlight for me.

Adjustment? Not a complete one! I cannot and do not want to ever modify to the accepted norm. I always want to feel the burden, the lostness, the aloneness of my sisters in the world.

Katherine lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Culture-Shock Vignettes

by Rosemary Wyse

A re-entry friend should be assigned to all returning personnel. I have done this for persons visiting North America (where and how to shop for best buys, coping with traffic, finding a doctor or dentist). Just as acute are the needs of North American citizens who have been out of the country for short or long periods.

Here are some re-entry first impressions and emotions:

- At Miami there was no translation of messages into other languages as there had been in other airports on the way home. In Miami there was only English, in spite of the influx of international visitors.

- My first purchase was a McDonald's hamburger; it gives a "now I'm home" feeling.

- We went to the mission board debriefing expecting to be given guidelines for adjusting to North American culture, economy, and church life. We received the opposite. They asked us about the present status of our work, the problems, conflicts, and joys we had just left. But there was no interpreting of the situation we were returning to live in.

- People (friendly and well-intentioned) often ask us how we are finding the adjustment, what we think about being back, how we are fitting in. We don't want to fit in! People don't really know what to ask because their experience is so different from ours. They are seldom exposed to news from other countries. We are starving for news from South America and there is nothing in the newspapers.

- Everyone has calendars which they promptly fill up; nothing seems to just happen. Appointments are met promptly as scheduled. We are bound by schedules.

- At supermarkets, the selection of products is overwhelming. How do you choose which of twenty-three brands is best? ...Everything is under one roof! And everything is packaged. I feel inundated by paper and plastic bags.... The enormous selection is dizzying; having to choose is impossible. Memories of meager selections, of prices four and five times higher, of

salaries of friends there—all these flood over and I leave the store, crying, unable to cope with the mind-boggling abundance so taken for granted here.

- I catch myself saving plastic cups or plates and spoons, knives, forks. I can't waste food. I keep thinking that some animal would like what I'm throwing away. ...There are so many throw-aways.

- Houses are filled with furniture, things on the walls, floors, in cupboards—there is stuff all over the place, especially so many artificial plants and flowers.

- I have difficulty adjusting to winter after living in a semi-tropical area. I don't know how to dress in houses with central heat.

- Above all, the returning person needs someone to listen for hours as you talk about your feelings, friends, experiences, work. As you talk you sort out and begin structuring a new value system—something you didn't know had changed so much until you are back in North America and look around. You have learned to think differently, evaluate differently, judge differently; your likes and dislikes have changed. You know that there is more than one way to do things, and each has value.

- For the single person it means re-entering alone; the majority of colleagues separate after assignment. To maintain ties over great distances costs energy and money. So when incidents, items, articles, pictures remind you of your overseas experience, you have no one to share it with. You have no one to evaluate things, with, to compare and to laugh with over the incongruities, to interpret feelings and changes, to cry with over the hurts. No one understands the dilemma you feel yourself in—being part of two worlds and not wanting to leave either.

Re-entry? No. Re-integration? Yes.

by Delores Friesen

Several years ago a friend, much older and much more "re-entry experienced" than I, told me, "Little bits of me are everywhere."

I think the quotation actually originated with Amy Carmichael, that renowned missionary to India, who never once re-entered England. Fifty years a missionary and re-entered, never!

Most of us, however, are not so fortunate or so dedicated as to remain in one country for fifty years. It is only in the last few years that our family has managed to stay in one place for more than two years. Several of these moves were neither expected or welcomed; others were planned and anticipated. Both kinds of moves have their own trauma and their own beauty. And, yes, "little bits of me are everywhere." For me, the question has become not how do you re-enter but how do you re-integrate?

How do you integrate the havenots and the haves, the empty shelves of Ghana and the glut of supermarket aisles that make one dizzy at first? How to integrate the former long lines and everlasting waits with the present

speed and rush? The warmth of embrace, and the formality without touch? The expressive joyous worship, and the distant interior reserve? The never-changing hot humidity, and the changing seasons? How integrate the dozen houses, the hundreds of friends, the myriad of experiences and ideas that no one but me possesses?

I have found a few concepts that help: (1) Life is a journey, and I am a pilgrim and stranger, no matter where I am. This concept from the Gospel has helped me more than any other—to move, to re-enter, to struggle with a feeling of not belonging has helped me long for that continuing city, and keep my possessions and wants within reason.

(2) The communion of saints is real. It is a gift, and for me it is almost a sacrament. Hebrews 12 has meaning for me—even if I never again see those dear to me in Nigeria, Ghana, LaJunta, Abetifi, Accra, Ibadan, Uyo—they are with me as a cloud of witnesses, spurring me on.

(3) Every culture has its strengths and its weaknesses. Minnie Graber helped me more than she will ever know, with her sage advice: "Before you go overseas, think through your own American culture. What are the values, the things you can affirm and want to keep? What are the aspects of that culture that may not be in line with your faith? Then, and only then, can you begin to respond freely and openly to another's culture." This concept is helpful both in embracing a new culture and in valuing and learning from one's country of origin.

(4) Reflection is necessary to re-integrate. Integration does not just happen. For me, journaling has been an important tool. Recording incidents, writing down ideas from my reading, thinking, feeling, praying, longing—these have helped to bring the various parts of my existence together. Conversation has been helpful; sharing ideas, experiences, and questions in the company of friends and family can be a valuable source of synthesis and creativity.

(5) Keep in contact with at least parts of your past. Memories and stories need to be recounted. Letter writing is a discipline and a skill that can be learned. It can also be a bridge, a link, a way to continue the contacts and learnings. The Apostle Paul used letters for more than casual conversation; so may we. Several friends who never left North America have been my teachers here. Their faithful letters over the thirteen years we were in Africa kept us in touch with their families, their communities, mutual college friends, churchwide concerns in the West, and their growing edges. Their letters helped me to integrate my worlds.

(6) Live fully where you are now. There are opportunities to grow and to share one's gifts wherever you are. Don't wait to make friends, to open yourself and your needs to others. Time may be shorter than you think. Unexpected moving has taught me to make relationships a high priority. The "instant friendships" one has with people in an overseas setting do not happen here without cultivation and time. But in-depth relationships are possible if those of us who return are willing to again work at accepting, loving

giving, sharing, listening.

I think the difficult thing is that we expect re-integration to happen automatically, and we are tired of having to make the extra effort to understand and relate after doing it for years in the foreign country. Where we are genuine and open, God's Spirit can make all things new!

Delores and her husband Stanley are living in Iowa City, Iowa.

A Matter of Priorities

by Irma Epp

When our family returned to Canada in 1973 after sixteen years of missionary service in Zaire, I really wondered what my new role would be. I had lived a very rich, fulfilling life in Zaire: houseparent to fifty-four children at a time, ranging from 8-18 years of age; a school teacher on both the elementary and secondary school level; a Sunday school superintendent; council member and council secretary at the Inter-denominational Church in Kinshasa; and a board member at the American School which had enrollment of 500 children.

Life has continued to be rewarding and fulfilling. Within a few weeks after our arrival, I was asked by our pastor to begin a Bible study for young mothers. This has grown to be one of the most meaningful sharing and learning experiences in my life. Members are drawn from various denominations and backgrounds, giving a richness to the interpretation of Christ's gospel. Several schools offered me teaching positions and I accepted a half-time position at M.B.C.I., our conference school. Besides teaching I spend as much time as I can as a counselor. The day is too short to meet all the needs that present themselves at my door. Besides numerous speaking engagements at women's conferences, Bible studies, and related church groups, I am also a member of the Manitoba Mennonite Brethren Christian Education Committee. This past fall the church asked my husband and me to assist in the diaconate ministry. There are so many opportunities for service right here at home. I am praying that I may keep my priorities straight.

Irma lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Reflecting after a Short Term of Service

by LuEtta Friesen

My husband and I volunteered for a three month MCC assignment at the Madhipura Christian Hospital in North Bihar, India. Our three children, aged 12, 10, and 7, accompanied us. My husband grew up in India and we had previously spent three years in that country when the two older children were very small. Our re-entry to the U.S. was not so traumatic because of these previous experiences and the shortness of the time abroad.

My biggest problem is in feeling that I am unable to share exactly what we had experienced. It comes out sounding worse or better than we actually felt it was at the time! Pictures certainly help, but it's hard to convey the atmosphere, feelings and dynamics of the situations we encountered. Our oldest daughter feels this too. She said, "It's hard to tell my friends just what it was like. They just smile and say, 'Oh!', so pretty soon I just don't talk about it. I think they get bored by it anyway."

I tend to compare the way of life in the U.S. with that in India. The children and my husband (who was a child in India) can better just accept each as it is and see value in each.

I was happy to be back where meal planning and cooking were easier. My daughter doesn't like to hear me complain about that. She said, "So! We had good food in India, it was sure better than the American food we tried to buy!"

The benefits for our family of a short term abroad far outweigh any problems in coming back to life in the U.S. We have numerous stories to recall together. From time to time we review the ways God answered our prayers at just the right time throughout the entire experience. Our appreciation for another culture has been heightened. We continue to enjoy the rice and curry meals (weekly) and the Hindi choruses the children sing (almost daily).

A danger now is to forget the people we learned to love and the promises we made to them—to write, to pray, to solicit financial aid, to send copies of pictures. As we become more and more involved here, India seems farther and farther away.

LuEtta lives in Middlebury, Indiana.

Assisting with Re-Entry

This is how one mission board is helping its employees return to North America after terms of service.

Harold E. Reed, personnel services secretary for the Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, says: "For the past several Octobers we have had a one-day retreat for terminating overseas personnel. We plan to have another this coming October. We find that this has helped persons get a perspective on what's happening to them during re-entry and feeling okay about that. We feel that we could do more in the whole area of the psychological adjustments involved in situations of rapid change. I believe this is an important area in which we need to resource our personnel, and generally very little has been done.

"A returned missionary," Reed continues, "has to say goodbye to overseas relationships and take initiative in building a new set of relationships in a chosen geographical area. One of the adjustment problems is that the missionary in an overseas setting has been a leader, but upon return suddenly becomes a follower and seems not to be needed. A problem cited at [last

October's] retreat was the missionary's desire to see many practices changed. It is important for the missionary to choose such issues carefully and demonstrate by personal lifestyle the values that he or she wants to communicate to the home church. The returned missionary needs to relate closely to a

community of discernment which will help with the re-entry adjustments."

And here is a letter sent to home church pastors just prior to a service worker's termination.

Dear _____,

This letter is to serve as a reminder that (name) from your congregation will be completing his/her Voluntary Service assignment in (location) on (termination date).

VSers, in moving from one community to another, often need to make a number of adjustments. I would like to share with you some of the things which have facilitated other volunteers' adjustments to life after VS.

Perhaps the first adjustment which faces terminating VSers is in the area of interpersonal relationships. They have generally been a part of a close fellowship where they have deeply shared their joys, frustrations, experiences, etc. For returning VSers, those deep relationships are not readily available upon their return home. I have observed that those who have a group with whom they can relate closely adjust much more quickly. When a returning VSer has no one to whom he can relate closely, he and others around him tend to accentuate their differences and thus make adjustments more difficult.

Volunteers have also been very much involved in activities at their VS location. They may have had responsible positions in the local church, been deeply involved in their job, and may have been well-known and active in their community. After VS, persons return to their home community where things have been happening without them. In short, some VSers may readily get the feeling that they are not needed or even wanted upon their return. Hopefully you will be able to find ways to involve (name) in the life of your local congregation.

In conclusion I would like to suggest several things which may facilitate a VSer's adjustment:

1. Arrange for (name) to relate experiences and testimony during the morning church service as soon after his/her return as possible.
2. Although some returning VSers need time to adjust, others are ready to move into positions of responsibility. If there is an opening for (name) to be involved, it may be appropriate to discuss this with him/her.
3. It may be helpful for you, as the pastor, to talk to (name) on a personal level about his/her concerns, experiences, goals, etc.
4. Perhaps by following your example, the congregation will give (name) a warm welcome and involve him/her in their activities.
5. Building close relationships with people will be one of the most important factors in facilitating his/her adjustment. Hopefully individuals in the congregation will assume some responsibility for this.

Some of the above suggestions may be helpful in your situation and you can probably think of others. I would appreciate hearing any of your observations about VSers' adjustment to life after VS. If I can be of any help to you, please give me a call. I am confident that God will bless you and your congregation as you welcome (name) back into your fellowship.

Sincerely, Voluntary Service Office

Which Way Women

a book review by Dianne N. Epp

Which Way Women? is a collection of articles related to women and edited by Dorothy Yoder Nyce under the sponsorship of MCC Peace Section's Task Force on Women. It contains insights into a lot of questions you may have thought of in relation to women, and more specifically Mennonite women, and perhaps to many questions you never considered. The articles are written by a wide cross section of women, and a few men, including contributions from Mennonite women abroad.

The articles are subdivided into three sections: Equality, Development, and Peace. The articles on equality include examination of various biblical perspectives concerning women as well as a number dealing with sexuality in general.

The section titled, "Development" deals with more specific roles of women in the world such as, "The Female Dimension of Palestinian Development" by Jane Nikkel Quiring and "Beyond the Motherhood Mystique" by Janet Umble Reedy. The most exciting articles in this section, in my opinion, dealt with the role of Mennonite women in respect to their own church. Ranging from a strongly affirmative article by Johanna Woudstra-Gorter on "Mennonite Female

Ministers in the Netherlands" (out of 81 pastors in the Dutch Mennonite Church, 18 are women) to the sense of rejection evidenced by Erna J. Fast's article concerning in her attempts to enter the "professional ministry" in the Mennonite church in the States, these articles speak to the question of a woman's place in the Mennonite church in a unique way.

Several of the most gripping articles occur in the third section entitled, "Peace." Dorothy Yoder Nyce's article, "Are Anabaptists Motherless?" pleads for a recognition and appreciation of the mothers of the Anabaptist heritage. Though she terms her anecdotes of historically-based people "windows with brief and partial glimpses," one cannot help but feel excitement and pride in renewed realization that women "were there" in a very visible way among the early Anabaptists, also as martyrs for their faith. One of the most powerful peace statements I have read in a long time is Dorothy Nickel Friesen's "Two Letters," dealing with the question of militarism in the public schools. Articles like these make *Which Way Women?* exciting reading.

Dianne co-parents (with Tony) young Alan and Rachel and sometimes teaches chemistry at Nebraska Wesleyan University in Lincoln.

Which Way Women? is available from MCC Peace Section, Akron, PA 17501. Please enclose \$3.00 (U.S.) and \$3.50 (Canada) with your order.

Last October's Re-entry Retreat (at Salunga, Pennsylvania) followed this schedule:

Friday

7:00 p.m. Registration

7:30 Get acquainted

8:00 Singing/Worship

Movie: "Begin with Goodbye" [See "Resources" in this Report]

Movie: "Changes," introduced by explanation of "The Emotional Cycle of Change": (1) Uninformed Optimism (Certainty), (2) Informed Pessimism (Doubt), (3) Hopeful Realism (Hope), (4) Informed Optimism (Confidence) and (5) Rewarding Completion (Satisfaction).

Group discussion led by Harold and Connie Stauffer.

Saturday

8:00 a.m. Breakfast

9:00 Singing "Spiritual Disciplines" led by Bertha Beachy, "Value Conflicts—When to Resist/Surrender?" and group discussion, "Role Shifts—Leader to Follower" and discussion.

12:15 Lunch and recreation

2:00 Singing "Spiritual Disciplines" led by Bertha Beachy, "Church Agenda—Third World vs. North American Mennonite," group discussion, and "Facilitating Re-entry (home congregation, mission board, etc).

5:30 Supper

6:30 Singing "Spiritual Disciplines," "Discovering Communities of Discernment" and discussion.

Major resources used by Bertha Beachy were Elizabeth O'Connor's books, especially *Search for Silence*, and Rich J. Foster's *Celebration of Discipline*.

Resources: "Returned Missionary Women"

compiled and reviewed by Delores Friesen

Films

1. *Begin with Goodbye*, approx. 15 minutes long, color, 16 mm. It is available from Mass Media Ministries: 2116 North Charles Street, Baltimore, MD 21218. Phone: 301-727-3270.

2. *Last Grave at Dimbaza*, (bw, 16 mm) is a social critique of the inequalities in South Africa. The value for our purposes (Re-entry) is the frequent flashbacks shown which contrast the world of the whites and the world of the blacks, the world of the Have and the world of the Have-Nots. I think particularly of the black maid who had to cajole and make up games to get the little white girl to eat her baby food; who then trudged the weary miles home to her own children with the protruding stomachs of starvation.

3. *The Chairy Tale*, a 5 minute bw film. It is very humorous, nonverbal—just a man trying to sit on a chair. The chair becomes animate and does not allow the man to sit down until he treats the chair with respect and honor. I think it could be used for the purpose of illustrating how our attitudes communicate and close off communication—we who return from overseas will never be able to sit where others sit here, will never be comfortable in our North American congregations unless we are willing to listen, to respect, to honor the "chairs" we are trying to sit on.

Books

Shifting Gears, Finding Security in a Changing World, by Nena and George O'Neill (M. Evans & Co., Inc.,

1974). This is THE best resource I know on this important topic. The book is divided into three sections: (1) Renewing the Self in a World of Crisis, (2) Formulating a Life Strategy: The Guidelines, and (3) The Self Finds Security: Integrating the Life Strategy. It tackles important sociological and psychological concerns, but is an immensely practical book. Topics include loneliness, creativity, decision-making, and change versus movement. It has a page of recommended books for continued reading plus a five page bibliography. Though the book is totally secular, it is much more in keeping with Christian values than popular passages, which may well have been built on the O'Neill's theory.

2. *Letters to Scattered Pilgrims*, Elizabeth O'Connor (Harper & Row, 1979). Balanced, searching and incisive this book confirms the fact that we are all pilgrims. As Christians we do not and should not fit with too much comfortableness into our world. Of particular help are the Lictionary of Scriptures—"for pilgrimage to the new land," and chapter 10, "Our Moving Center." Undergirding all of the letters and chapters is the premise that three elements must be held in tension: (1) the mystical (emotional, experiential) element, (2) the traditional creative (historical, social) element, and (3) the intellectual (critical) element. This statement alone offers profound insight to someone working with the tensions of re-entry. It can be helpful in reintegrating existence and history, in learning to critique ourselves rather than criticize others.

3. *My Several Worlds: A Personal Record*, by Pearl Buck (Pocket Books, 1954, 1965), 472 pp. This is Pearl Buck's autobiography in which she describes her several worlds. The description of various cultures, values and experiences is interesting but the primary value of the book is the concept that a person may have "Several Worlds" and still be a whole person, one who can perhaps see and understand issues with fresh clarity and insight because of the varied cross-cultural experiences.

4. *The Exile and The Fighting Angel*, by Pearl Buck, (Pocket Books, 1963, first published in 1936 by John Day). These biographies of her mother and her father are two finely-wrought portraits complementary and inseparable. Of most value, however, for our purposes is *The Exile*. This story tells how her mother felt in exile, though she lived most of her life in China. (The father's story contrasts for he became so Chinese he hardly knew America.) Persons struggling with re-entry questions and feelings will identify with both books. Of particular interest is the conscious effort made by Pearl Buck's mother to see that her children (only two of the four survived) could feel equally at home in either the Chinese or the American culture. How she did this is an amazing story, especially given the long terms of nine

years between furloughs, the vagrancies of war, famine, death, and pre-jet time lags for travel, letters and communication. Also important is the way Pearl found herself adapting to and learning to accept both her father's and her mother's contrasting ways of identification and re-entry into Chinese and American culture.

5. *To Say a Hearth*, by Myra Scovel. (Out of print but available in many libraries.) Many readers know Scovel's earlier books, *Chinese Ginger Jars & Richer By India*. This story is set in America, a saga of struggles and joys in laying a hearth on American soil. How does a second generation missionary family who had many exciting adventures in China and India readjust to American life? How do they create feelings of home?

News and Verbs

Women in Mission (General Conference Mennonite) is recommending that families learn more about mission work by going in person to these areas rather than taking other overseas vacations. The organization voted to send two women to Japan, Taiwan, and Hong Kong by the end of 1981. **Tina Block Ediger**, director of mission services, reporting on similar visits to Africa, said she could not emphasize enough what this had done for the African women in the eyes of their husbands.

Ruth Chen, director of the women's choir that toured North America prior to the 1978 Mennonite World Conference, has been named one of the ten outstanding women of Taiwan.

Dorothy Friesen reported on the 1979 Urbana (Illinois, missionary) conference: To my annoyance, the language of the conference was heavily sexist. Dark-suited men filled the platform each morning and evening. Occasionally a woman prayed on the platform or gave a testimony. Only seven women had been chosen to lead the sixty-plus elective workshops each afternoon. And their topics tended to be things like "The Role of the Single Woman in Missions," "The Role of the Married Woman in Missions," and "Nurses in Mission." The number of women leaders was surely out of proportion to the number serving in missions overseas.

Elisabeth Elliot, one of two women speakers in the plenary sessions, praised Pope John Paul II's anti-feminist stance in her talk on the cost of discipleship.

One of the few opportunities that successful, aggressive American men have to practice genuine servanthood or to work in real partnership before going overseas is to work with women. But that is often denied them by a distorted interpretation of what the Bible says about the gifts and roles of women. And I was sorry to see Urbana not overcoming that.—"Urbana and the Amazing Missionary Enterprise," *The Other Side*, March 1980, p. 36. Dorothy is currently itinerating for Mennonite Central Committee and the General

Conference Mennonite Commission on Home Ministries.

Naomi Yanada, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Hiroshi Yanada (he is pastor of a Japanese Mennonite church), is studying in the United States and wants to get training to be a medical missionary.

April 26 is the day that thirteen national (U.S.) peace and women's organizations will come together for an anti-nuclear march in Washington, D.C., at one of the preparatory meetings, initiated by Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, international president Kay Camp said, "Especially in an age where every local conflict can lead to nuclear war which few could survive, we must oppose military solutions anywhere. We must keep open all channels for human contact and international arbitration. Women must become a dynamic force in the struggle against gigantic arms budgets, arms sales, growing militarization, and the proliferation of nuclear weapons which is implicit in the spread of nuclear power."

"It is no longer taken for granted that the director's wife (in MCC service in Bolivia) will assume the job of hostess; rather a volunteer couple is assigned to the task of hosting and maintenance, thus freeing the director's wife to choose responsibilities suited to her talents and interests.... Contrary to traditional roles, MCC-Bolivia has women on the agricultural team, and has had men on the health team." A committee of workers (Ethel Shank, Sarah Burkholder, Dean Hartley, and Linda Lehman) also recommended "that home-making and family life be valued by both men and women in MCC-Bolivia, and that ways be found to raise our consciousness on this issue."—*Intercom*, January 1980.

Going back to seminary after a term of service overseas helps initiate us once again to this cultural milieu as well as keep us informed on the latest thinking trends, books and resources available to the church in her various ministries.—Arlene and James Stauffer, on furlough from the Philippines, reporting in *Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries Window*.

When you come across news and verbs that you would like to share with the thousand readers of this *Report*,

send them to me at 4830 Woodland Ave., Lincoln, NE 68516.—Muriel Thiessen Stackley, Editor

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor:

Recently a little incident occurred to me here that intrigues me and I thought you might enjoy hearing about it. While shaking hands with the people coming to services on a Sunday morning recently, one elderly member handed me a note recommending to me an article in the March issue of *Moody Monthly* entitled "Is the Church Unfair to Women?" This brother rarely does this, and his only comment was something to the effect that it was a good article on the Biblical position. Before I managed to get a copy of that issue of MM at the Souderton Provident Bookstore, I received your Jan.-Feb. issue of *Report*. And since I plan to attend a three session workshop this weekend for overseers, Leadership Commission members, and other Franconia Conference committee chairpeople on the General Assembly's Study report on Leadership and Authority, I read the *MCC Report* with more than usual care and interest since it focussed specifically upon the speaking ministry of the church. After reading most of it carefully, I purchased that issue of MM and read the article abovementioned.

Perhaps it will be sufficient for me to simply reproduce here the memo I have written to my elderly brother in response to his recommending the article in MM to me:

"Was it providential, unfortunate, or accidental that I received a new issue of MCC's Peace Section Task Force on Women in Church and Society newsletter between the time you gave me the reference to the MM article and today when I was able to buy a copy? I will let you to judge. They are more or less diametrically opposed and yet related in a peculiar manner.

"Geo. Sweeting (author of the article) is president of Moody Bible Institute. The MCC newsletter alludes to a book by Dorothy Pape entitled *In Search of God's Ideal Woman*. She in turn mentions a Frederick Franson who was the first missionary commissioned by D.L. Moody's church. Author Pape says of Franson: "He carefully noted every reference..." (the quote on page 2, first paragraph).

"This, by the way, is not the only thing that Moody himself stood for which his namesake Moody Bible Institute does not. Another is nonresistance. The Institute has moved far afield from this biblical conviction of D.L. Moody's. As we move into this difficult question of women in ministry, I would only urge that we be as open to "new truth" as we are honest with our past preferences. Thanks for sharing the reference with me. See MM lead article, p. 20.

"P.S. Let's discuss this further face-to-face at the first opportunity. GCS"

This brother is not a contentious person though he does take a minority view on things from time to time. He is 83 years old and is in relatively good health. I feel we are never too old to grow by sharing one with another "in Christ's name." Sincerely yours, Gerald C. Studer, pastor, Plains Mennonite Church, 1260 Orchard Lane, Lansdale, PA 19446.

USPS 367-790

The *Report* is a bi-monthly publication of the MCC Peace Section Task Force on Women in Church and Society. Correspondence should be sent to Editor Muriel Thiessen Stackley, 4830 Woodland, Lincoln, NE 68516.

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